

A LETTER TO A FRIEND.

PHILADELPHIA, *November 26, 1838.*

MY DEAR SIR—

You have not been wrongly informed. I am not ashamed, although one may well be afraid, to confess, that I sympathize with the Canadians, and desire to see them independent. But, while such is the bent of my inclination, far am I from calling in question the correctness of the motives of those, who differ from me. As in all the instances, in which I may have dissented from you, and our friend W——, I barely ask to be heard dispassionately. It is very true, as you say, that, I reprobated interference in the affairs of Mexico; or rather, I condemned the course of our government, in conniving at the invasion of that country. But, I see no inconsistency, between what I said then as to Texas, and what I say now, in relation to Canada. The cases are, in all essential circumstances, different, as I shall endeavor to show; and the very distinction makes the conduct of our government, on the several occasions, the more shamefully inconsistent and reprehensible.

What language can so well describe, the impropriety of our conduct to Mexico, as the denunciations, now pronounced, against sympathy for Canada? What rebuke, to our late President, can be so bitter as the proclamation of his successor, who promised to tread in his foot-steps? How can such glaring contrasts be reconciled? And yet, those, who tossed up their caps for the one, now hurl them in the air for the other!

It never was pretended, that Mexicans, or natives of that part of Mexico called Texas, complained of any tyranny, or that they were in revolt there. The Mexicans were all of one origin, religion, and interest. Those, who dwelt in Texas, were a part of a common family, cemented by the ties of nationality and kindred blood. They were contented with their lot, and willing to share the common destiny of their countrymen.

Who, then, were the insurgents in Texas? Almost to a man, Anglo-American citizens, who had gone there on speculation. To sustain this sort of insurrection, volunteers were openly invited, mustered, armed and marched from the United States. No interruption was offered! No arrests were attempted! No proclamation was issued! On the contrary, a part of our regular army was sent into the Mexican Territory; took post there; and made a powerful diversion in favor of those, who went to take what did not belong to them. Instead of denouncing those truly lawless proceedings, grave senators, in their places, applauded them. Instead of lamenting the disposition of men, with Saxon blood in their veins, to divide, overcome and oppress the weak, (as men of Saxon blood have almost always done,) our senators boasted of the inclination, as well as of

the ability, to conquer an unoffending neighbour! To such an extent, indeed, was this spirit diffused, that but few persons dared to utter the sound of remonstrance!

What had Mexico ever done, to warrant such a wanton disregard of her rights? Had she been our own old task-master? Had we waged war with her? Had she ever aroused the savages to devastate our frontiers? Had she sent emissaries to effect a dissolution of our Union? Had any of her people come into our waters, in the dead of night, and murdered those found on board one of our vessels? Nothing of this kind had ever taken place. If there ever had been any cause of complaint, a late treaty had obliterated all remembrance of it.

If we had no complaint as to the past, what fears existed, as to the future? We had not the one, any more than the other. Our own soundest policy was, to have a passive neighbour on such a frontier, and not a colony of adventurers. If we interfered at all in the affairs of Mexicans, it should have been, to cheer, to advise, and protect them in their weakness; especially as, in defiance of prejudices, they were trying to establish a republic like our own; and yet, we made all but open war upon them, in favor of our own invading citizens! We did so, ere the seal on our treaty with them was dry!

Is there the smallest resemblance between the cases of Texas and Canada? I have briefly stated the one, let me now refer to the other.

The Canadians were conquered by the English, and have been ever since held in bondage by them. They are separated from them, less by the broad Atlantic, than in origin, religion and interest. So little did they assimilate, that, when our own revolution broke out in 1775, the English feared that the Canadians also would revolt. So natural did this course appear to ourselves, that we invited them to throw off a foreign yoke. It is true, the Canadians did not obey our call; but their inactivity was not owing to any fondness for the English, or to any dislike towards us. On the contrary, when the troops under Montgomery, and those under Arnold, penetrated their country, no Canadian arm was lifted against them; and when our countrymen were discomfited, if the Canadians had not helped them in battle, they poured oil into their wounds when it was over. The true causes of their inactivity were, their peculiarly pacific habits, and their submission to their clergy. The English artfully appealed to their French feelings, and to their religious prejudices. They were told, that by a connection with the Puritans of New England, their own Catholic faith would be trampled upon, and their religious houses desecrated.

Again—When the French revolution occurred, a revolt in Canada was apprehended; and then a new course, of conciliation, was resorted to. The maintenance of French civil laws was guaranteed, and even a constitution was granted. What was refused to the thirteen colonies, in 1775, at the point of the bayonet, was granted to the Canadians, without solicitation, in 1791: that is, the right of levying taxes and appropriating revenue. No taxes were to be levied, or revenue appropriated, without the consent of the local legislature. The exercise, of this constitutional and conceded right, was, however, at no time, fully enjoyed. Swarms of crown officers were sent to Canada, just as they had been sent to the thirteen colonies, “to harrass the people and eat out their substance.”—Those stipendiaries did not choose to have their salaries regulated according

to the simple and economical principles of America, but agreeably to the luxurious and extravagant practices in England. When the representatives of the Canadians, therefore, called for accounts, of the way in which the revenue was expended, several of them were sent to prison; and, when, in consequence, the supplies were manfully stopped by the legislature, its hall was closed by an armed force. "Repeated petitions were only answered by repeated injury." The operation of laws was suspended. Force was substituted. And, at last, resistance became not merely allowable, but obligatory.

The consequent scenes in Canada have become familiar to us. They are such as the present lord chancellor Plunkett described, with reference to Ireland. The Union, of that country with England, was not brought about, merely by the distribution of three millions of pounds in bribes; but, as he tells us, by "the forcible suppression of public meetings—the use of armed violence—the denial of legal protection—trials by court martial—and the familiar use of the torture." If the triangle is not in use in Canada, gibbets, capable of bearing heavy burdens, are substituted, and the torch devastates whole districts!

The revolt in Canada, therefore, is no fiction, like that in Texas. Our own example has been steadily followed—long suffering, and resistance only when oppression became intolerable. The revolvers really are Canadians. The banished, the hanged, and the burnt-out had all "a local habitation and a name" there. It is true, they are called rebels, traitors and brigands, by loyalists there, and loyalists here; and prices are set upon the heads of some of them; but we ought not to forget, that Hancock and Adams were put out of the pale of mercy; and that all, who took part with them were proscribed, as Papineau and Nelson now are.

In this instance, however, no volunteers are openly equipped and marched from our borders. No General Gaines takes post in Canada, to give countenance to the invaders. No loans are opened in our exchanges. No editors become partners in a projected partition of Canadian lands.—No appeals are made, by men in high places, to the "glorious spirit which mingles with Saxon blood." On the contrary, our whole civil and military power is arrayed, to prevent our citizens from interfering in the conflict in Canada; and proclamations are issued, not only forbidding any violation of neutral obligations, but announcing to the British officers, that the American government will, in no way, interfere to prevent the infliction of punishment upon such of our citizens, as may be made prisoners!

That is, the invaders of Texas, where there was no tyranny or revolt, were cheered on their way to conquest; and the volunteers, who went to aid oppressed neighbors, in Canada, where there is tyranny and consequent revolt, are doomed to the gibbet! General Jackson himself aroused a spirit, unfavorable to unoffending Mexico: Mr. Van Buren throws his whole influence against unfortunate Canada! Weak Mexico is bereft of two of her Provinces, and mighty England is helped to keep hers in chains!

If Mexico had done nothing to warrant outrage upon her; and, if we had no apprehension of her power or machinations, hereafter, how stands the matter as to England? If the events of the last war, balanced accounts up to that time; if nothing need be said of the northern boundary; if the burning of the *Caroline*, and the murder of those who were on board, in

our own waters, may be passed over—may we not look into the future?—With what view has Canada been held? Have any advantages warranted the enormous expenditures there? With what view did the Governor of Canada, Sir J. Craig, send John Henry to Boston? Can there be a doubt, but that Canada has been held, in the expectation of making it a wedge to sever our Union? I have understood, that, under lord Castlereagh, the use to which Canada might be put, was solemnly discussed; and that, under lord Wellington, a line of fortifications for future purposes, was traced out, and partly constructed. In a late debate, on the Canada question, in the British house of Peers, the latter said, that the next war with us must not be “a little war.”

In a pamphlet, entitled “Canada a Kingdom,” written by Sir Alexander Malet, dedicated to lord Howick, and published in 1832, there is the following remarkable passage:

“The aristocracy of wealth, which the unexampled progress, of national prosperity, has elevated upon the surface of republican institutions [in the United States,] has not been, and should not be, overlooked by English statesmen. Let them raise a sceptre on the banks of the St. Lawrence, and we may live to see its shadow on the Delaware and Potomac.”

The coincidence, between the views of Sir J. Craig, and those of Sir A. Malet, after a lapse of more than twenty years, shows that British statesmen do not overlook the advantages, which their country may derive from our dismemberment. No one can doubt their inclination to witness it; and there may still be among ourselves some, who would desire to make “the Potomac the boundary.” The British possessions in America, therefore, may be held until some occasion may arise, fit for making the surrender of them a temptation, to raise some such sceptre as is here referred to.

You may regard such fears as chimerical. I hope they are so. No one abhors wars more than I do; nor is there any one, who would regret hostilities with England especially, more than I would. But, unhappily, apprehension is the result of experience. In a debate on the Canada question, in the British House of Peers, Lord Brougham said, he hoped our Union might long endure; for, if broken up, the most disastrous consequences would follow, owing to the natural inclination of man for war. It is painful, and even degrading, to think so; and yet it may be hazardous to entertain an opposite opinion. Be this as it may, certain it is, that history is little more than a record of such atrocities, as even the callous must shudder at. Nations, falsely calling themselves Christians, have out-run all barbarians in the race of blood. I fear, it is, therefore, fallacious to hope, that, even if we shall give no cause of alarm, we shall escape the fate of other States; and, consequently, it is hazardous to neglect suitable means of defence, or to stifle a spirit, which is essential for the preservation of all that is dear to man—

*Gens ferri patiens, ac læta domare labores,
Paulatim antiquo Patrum desuescit honori.*

Our rapid advancement to power, as a republic, is well calculated to disturb crowned heads; and our commercial and naval propensities can scarcely be contemplated with satisfaction, by England especially. There is a lurking apprehension, of our future power, which is perfectly

consistent with the history of maritime States. It is true, there is an obvious reform, in the conduct of the people and governments of particular countries; but still the selfish principle rules in cabinets as well as in counting-houses. If any such jealousy or enmity shall arise, we may defy it, if Heaven shall endow us with wisdom, to preserve our Union; but "this (says Washington) is the point in our political fortress, against which the batteries of *internal* and *external* enemies, will be most constantly, though covertly directed."

Such reflections, as these, made me deplore our conduct to Mexico. It has given a plausible excuse to foreigners, to desire to check our growth. It is not the interest of mankind, that we should become the Russia of the New World. Europe has a deep stake in the trade of South America, Mexico and the West Indies. Having seen some of our Senators pointing to the Pacific, as our destined boundary; and contemplating Mexico as our next scene of insurrectionary operation; European statesmen may consider themselves authorised to stop us in our march. How that may be done may become the only question; and the project of Sir Alexander Malet may not be deemed visionary.

The same considerations, which made me deprecate our conduct to Mexico, influence my wishes as to Canada. I desire that we may give no cause of offence, or pretext for retaliation hereafter. But, at the same time, if we interfered at all, it should not have been against a weak and unoffending neighbour, from whom we had nothing to apprehend hereafter; but, in favor of oppressed neighbours, against a power holding them as a rod over us.

I am not, however, let me repeat, for any interference, that is not right in itself, or warranted by what is called the law of nations. I am not for approving, as to Canada, what I condemned in relation to Mexico. As a government, we have quite enough to do at home. Time, the press and steam are at work for Canada, for ourselves and for mankind. The liberty of Canada may be won in Europe or in Asia. It must be ultimately achieved. Even Machiavel admits, "It is hopeless to reduce to slavery a people imbued with the spirit of freedom." In the meantime, our own best shields are honesty and fair dealing with all around us, be they weak or strong. We need a reputation, especially for being content with what we have. We want condensation and homogeneity, not expansion and diversity.

If there is any discrepancy, between what I wrote as to Texas, and what I have thus said, I am not aware of it. I reprobated the armed invasion of the territory of a neighbour, not in revolt. I condemned the conspiracy, among our own citizens, to go and take whole provinces from a weak and unoffending people, who were under no foreign yoke. I appealed to the sense of justice of our country, against the open connivance of our government, at what history must pronounce dishonorable. All this I did as to Texas, and would do so, were the case of Canada parallel. But the cases are wholly dissimilar; and yet, I am not for interference by our government; and, since it is the requisition of the law, I am not for the interference of our citizens.

But, while these are my sentiments, I still wish to see the Canadians free, and I am not surprised at the efforts of some of our citizens to make them so. There may be reckless men on our frontier, as there

are every where. Yet I am not prepared to cast opprobrium upon all, who may desire to help their neighbours. I could not do so without dishonoring the memory of thousands, who bled to secure to us all that we ourselves possess.

If our countrymen, who have interfered, are as wrong, as is represented; I maintain, that much may be fairly said in their defence; and I will state to you a few of their apologies:

1. Let it be borne in mind, that the fathers, or grand-fathers, of many of them, mainly contributed to conquer the French possessions in America. The descendants, therefore, may have supposed, that they had some right to tread upon a soil, which had been wet with the blood of their sires.

2. Let it be borne in mind, that they did not go, as the governor of Canada sent John Henry, as spies and incendiaries, to excite a civil war, where there was peace; but that they went, with arms in their hands, to take open part with the weak and the oppressed against the strong and the oppressors.

3. Let it be borne in mind, that they did not go to secure cotton plantations, or to introduce slavery, where it was prohibited; but that they went to a country, barren, when compared with their own, to strike off the shackles of their neighbours, friends and kindred.

4. Let it be borne in mind, that they did not go to a certain victory, as in Texas, over weak and despised bands, but to a deadly struggle with brave and disciplined troops.

5. Let it be borne in mind, that, in our 4th of July orations and toasts, for more than half a century, we have been paying the highest honors to the volunteers of all nations, who helped ourselves to break our chains.

6. Let it be borne in mind, that our northern citizens, less than three years ago, saw our Executive, some of our Senators, and several of our southern and western states, conniving at, and even aiding volunteers, to take an entire country, where there was no real revolt.

7. Let it be borne in mind, that they saw our government acknowledge the independence of the country, thus despoiled from a weak neighbour.

8. Let it be borne in mind, that our frontier citizens saw English volunteers, wherever there was an insurrection—in France, Spain, Portugal, Belgium, Poland, Circassia, Cabul, Mexico and the States of South America.

Is it wonderful, then, that humble men, who usually act under generous, however erroneous, impulses, felt a desire to help oppressed neighbours, with many of whom there existed ties of blood? Was any thing more natural than for them to say, “surely, our government, after wishing our own citizens to extend slavery in Texas, cannot upbraid us for trying to extend liberty in Canada. Surely, after extolling the foreigners, who helped us in our day of trial, our government will not consider us as pirates and brigands for imitating their example. Surely the English, who have amassed power, by dividing and weakening other states, in Asia, Europe and America, will not dare to treat our volunteers in any other way, than they insist their own volunteers shall be treated, namely, as prisoners of war, when taken in a revolted country.

"Surely we may dread the future machinations of the English on our frontier, and we may help our neighbours to form a government for themselves, from which we may not apprehend any evil."

Such, I say, are some of the considerations, which may have naturally and justly arisen, in the minds of our frontier citizens. If they were not right, there is ample apology for far greater error. If there is criminality, in any quarter, more than in any other, that quarter is the seat of our own government. There the invasion and partition of Texas were, I doubt not, planned. From that quarter, issued the authority to General Gaines, to take post in Texas, thus countenancing the proceedings there.

And yet, what is the result, as to Canada? What is the condition of hundreds of our citizens, misguided by their own government, who have been taken prisoners there? As if the British loyalists were not sufficiently ferocious, and disposed to hang them, our President proclaims, that he will not interfere between them and the ignominious gibbet! It may be, that there is a precedent for this in English annals, for those annals, unfortunately, are sufficiently bloody; but, if there is, I confess I have no remembrance of it. On the contrary, I do not believe there is a true-hearted English statesman, who would have put his name, to such a proclamation, as that issued on the 21st inst., by our Democratic President, "in the 63d year of American Independence." If any British statesman would forbear, to save from the gallows, English volunteers, taken in arms in a revolted country, he would not proclaim the circumstance to the world; much less would he do it, to please a powerful nation, after having just before applauded volunteers, who invaded and dismembered a weak one. The opposite course, I think, has been pursued by the British. They have insisted, that English volunteers, taken in arms in a revolted country, should be treated as prisoners of war. It is true, that, in our own revolution, they threatened to hang such volunteers, as common out-laws; but we then had a Washington, who caused those volunteers to be treated as prisoners of war, by denouncing retaliation as the consequence of a different treatment.

Suppose, for a moment, that the Mexicans had hanged those, who invaded Texas, where there was no revolt; nay, let us call to mind the absolute fact, that Santa Anna did treat those volunteers as brigands, seeing that they entered a country at peace, uninvited, and palpably for selfish ends—what was the consequence? Our whole country was aroused, to go and avenge the alledged outrage! And yet, the late Proclamation of our own President, as to our citizens in Canada, where there is revolt, justifies what Santa Anna did, and reprobates our sympathy for those, who were massacred by his orders!

Let me be understood. The cases of Texas and Canada are wholly dissimilar. We had no complaint against the Mexicans, but we had against the English. We had no cause to fear the one, but we had to dread the machinations of the other. The former were weak and the latter are powerful. Yet we connived at the invasion of the one, where there was no tyranny; and have denounced aid to the other, where there is tyranny. We invited volunteers from all countries, to help us, in our own day of trial, the French, the Poles and the Irish especially—and yet we denounce as "nefarious" any interference of our own citizens

in favor of our oppressed neighbours ! I do not applaud interference, since the law forbids it ; but, I do say, that it is natural, and not at all surprising. On the contrary, it would have been unnatural and astonishing, if there had not been interference. The criminality is upon our own government, and upon them will rest the odium, if the gibbets in Canada shall be adorned with American heads.

As to the Canadians themselves, they must at last be free. Revolutions never go back. The very horrors, now perpetrated in their country, must keep alive all the passions, that are most fierce and productive of war. The arts, necessary to success, in arms, will be learned. They will be growing strong. It is very easy to deride their late exertions, and to say "those, who would be free, themselves must strike the blow." I say, it is very easy to pretend, that the Canadians do not desire freedom, or that they are not oppressed, because they have not conquered. Such suggestions are utterly fallacious. No one can say, that the Poles or the Irish are free, or that they are not oppressed, because the military power of their oppressors is greater than their own.

Where is the slave so lowly
Condemned to chains unholy
Who—could he burst
His chains at first,
Would pine beneath them slowly ?

Where has there been a successful, revolt, without foreign aid ? Is it certain that our own revolt would have been successful, if we had been left to our own resources ? Were we not compelled to petition kings and burgo-masters to help us ? And, with all that kings and burgomasters did, were we not struggling for seven years, ere we succeeded ? We had two millions of people—the Canadians have not one-sixth of that number, and of these a fierce minority are subsisting upon the majority. The military force to over-awe the Canadas, is far greater in proportion, than the English armies in our own revolution. It is cruel and unjust, therefore, to pretend that the triumph of force, in Canada, is a discredit to the Canadians, any more than it is a rebuke to Poland, that Russia is more powerful.—There are more prisoners now in the jails of Canada, than there were in the jails of the thirteen colonies. I repeat the question, what revolt has been successful without foreign aid ? And I have only to point to our own revolt, and to the revolts in Mexico and South America, for an answer.—The true source of the odium, attempted to be cast upon Canadians, is to be traced to British policy. To excuse oppression, the oppressed have always been held up to derision. The Scotch, and the Irish, nay the people of our own country, were represented, just as the Canadians now are. If the Canadians are not accustomed to arms, why are they not ?—Because it has been the design of their rulers, that they should be ignorant. I say it is cruel, therefore, in Americans, to be echoing against the Canadians, such sarcasms as were once cast upon themselves.

Although I say all this—although I have written to you this long letter—I am not disposed to encourage the Canadians to further efforts at this time.—A war in Europe, a revolt in Ireland, or in India ; or an invasion of the latter, may effect at an early day, what must take place at last—the expulsion of Europeans, as masters of any part of our American soil.

Yours,

William L. Swanwick